

At the steamship company we were again told it was very regrettable, but not really their fault. There was nothing they could do now. At Cybele's insistence, I left it at that. On the way back to the hotel she gave her one judgement of Mr. Kaffeemann.

"He was a very foolish man, but a very good one. He believed in himself."

I left the next day for Zurich to make arrangements for the funeral. Cybele did not know yet if she ought to go herself and meet his family. We said we hoped we would meet again. Thus was the death of Mr. Kaffeemann, builder of monuments.

Beyond the Wall

John Robert Foutty

"Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question."

PAUL sauntered down the street, kicking the clumps of grass growing in the cracks in the pavement. He wished that he lived near the schoolhouse, and he wanted to run home, but he was afraid the others would notice. Several children shouted behind him and he winced, digging his hands deep in his pockets the way he did when everyone chose sides during recess period. The schoolbooks slipped from under his arm, and he wanted to let them fall, leaving them there on the sidewalk. He straightened the books with his free arm and walked on. The sidewalk was almost obscured by weeds so thick they seemed to grow from the cement. The other children had all turned into their homes, and Paul relaxed, stopped peering at the sidewalk, and gazed at the giant sycamore at the end of the street. Grey clouds filtered the light through jagged gaps, and the patchwork bark peeling from the trunk of the tree gave glints of white, purple, and gray in a shifting haze. The branches seemed to be great arms lashing out from the heavy body of the trunk; as if in pain from the great flesh-colored fungus encircling its base. He stepped from the last broken slab of the sidewalk and moved toward the tree, shivering as the tall grass brushed against his trousers.

The clouds became thinner and broke up into uneven shapes as Paul walked into the shadow of the tree. A milkweed snapped in his path, and the juice ran down the shattered stalk like thick white blood oozing from a severed vein. He reached up and stripped the last gray leaves from an overhanging branch, uncovering the winter buds beneath. They were red and smooth, like the spurs on a bird's leg. The branches appeared to be gigantic rough claws now that he had revealed the buds, and as he heard a rustling high in the tree, he dropped his books and ran, stumbling over the uneven ground.

"If I can only reach the fence," he thought. "Then I'll be safe. Can't even see my house from here."

Bushes tore at his clothes, and his jacket and trousers were covered with mud where he had fallen, but he kept on until he saw

the wooden fence latticing the horizon. His tiring legs seemed stronger now; his lungs filled suddenly, easily, and he ran with his eyes fastened on the bobbing lines of the fence. When he reached it, his legs buckled, and he gripped the middle rail with quivering arms, his chest tight and dry inside. Gasping for breath, he saw the roof of his house looming above the hill before him. It seemed a long way off. Directly above the dark roof, two cloud-faces seemed to be arguing, rolling in the sky with strange mobility.

Paul glanced back, twisting the bottom of his jacket with hands that felt big and useless. "The books will be there when I go to school tomorrow," he thought. The branches of the sycamore jutted out awkwardly, and something seemed to be sitting on one of the limbs; something dark and sharp-looking. He turned away. Brushing the dirt and twigs from his clothes, he struggled between the lower cross-bars of the fence and started threading his way through the underbrush toward home.

As Paul approached his house, he searched for his mother's white face behind the dark hall window. The house was always in shadow, even on the brightest summer day—had an unlive-in look accentuated by smells of neglect and age. The quiet that filled it was like death lying in a casket behind locked doors. He always walked cautiously through the hallways, suspecting that a shadow from one of the corners would leap out at him. He thought of himself being swallowed up by the darkness and shivered. Then, as the wall enclosing the yard loomed before him, he wondered what he could say to his mother.

Mrs. Pallfeld stood behind the hall window, watching her son climb over the stone fence and shuffle toward the walk. Her faded green eyes peered steadily through the window, and blue veins throbbled at her temples as she twisted the thick gold band on her finger. When Paul came down the terrace steps, his head jerked forward, tumbling his unruly black hair over his eyes. Mrs. Pallfeld's hands fluttered to her throat. She remembered how Arthur had walked down those same steps five years ago. "Has it been that long," she mused. "Paul looks so like him, so unresponsive." Sullen, that was it, yet if there was no spark that could ignite whatever was inside; as if perhaps there *was* really nothing inside at all—nothing she knew at least. Her forehead knotted into a grid of wrinkles as she shook her head. "He won't be like Arthur," she muttered. "He won't!" Her eyes glistened as she turned from the window and walked to the door.

"Paul. Paul, come in and wash!"

Paul threw his jacket over the back of a kitchen chair and went to the sink.

"Don't use the sink. What's wrong with the bathroom?"

"It's dark in there."

"You can turn on the light, it's just at the end of the hall. You could change your clothes too. Don't see how you can get so filthy!"

"Not very dirty," Paul grumbled as he turned on both faucets full force and stuck his hands under them, watching the water turn muddy as it splashed from his hands to the white bowl.

Mrs. Pallfeld sighed, picked up an opened can and threw it into the wastebasket, then sat at one end of the table, waiting for him to finish washing. "Your food's going to get cold while you're dawdling around, Paul."

Her son looked at the wastebasket, then at the table." I'm hungry!"

"There's plenty to eat. You're too particular; probably have to throw half of this food out anyway." Mrs. Pallfeld broke a thin slice of bread and buttered it absently, watching him dig his fingernails into the soap.

There were no windows at the west end of the kitchen, and the afternoon sun filtered obliquely through the window above the sink, throwing a hazy gray light at the corner of the room. The rest of the kitchen was filled with an almost physical shadow which seemed to be squeezing the light back toward the window. A faint curl of steam rose from the two bowls of soup on the table and blended with the shadow, giving it an illusion of slow movement.

Paul dried his hands on the front of his trousers and sat down, eyeing the pale slabs of meat and artificial-looking vegetables half-heartedly, pushing them around with his fork until they were mixed into a lump in the middle of his plate. He shoved the plate away. "What kind of soup?"

"Vegetable."

Paul grimaced. "All right. Hot anyway."

Mrs. Pallfeld's face hardened into an impassive mask. She carefully cleaned the last bit of food from her plate and slid her bowl toward her until it clicked against the edge of the plate. The noise startled her and she squinted almost defensively as Paul glanced up. "I'd better turn on the light . . . hardly see in here now." She reached up behind her and flicked on the light without moving her chair.

A bright light plunged down, falling harshly on the table-top, but blunting against the shadows at the corners of the room. He blinked and stared at the kitchen cabinet filling the furthest corner of the room. A curiously-dressed man seemed to be beckoning to him from the surface of a porcelain jar which was surrounded by small vials of spices. The figure glared at him, and he shifted his gaze to the picture on the other end of the cabinet. Only the obstinate ticking of the living-room clock broke the silence. Paul opened his mouth as if to speak, but there was nothing to say, and he peered at the picture, his mouth open . . . making little soundless movements.

He felt the way he did when he was in church, wanting to laugh, but not able to because the window was looking and everything was quiet except for the monotonous rumble of the minister's voice.

He could almost feel his father sitting next to him at church as he stared at the picture in the yellowed frame. "He isn't dead," Paul thought, and he sat very quietly, waiting for his father's soft reassuring voice. The only sound in the room was the regular click of his mother's spoon in her bowl and the rattle of branches across the window. "She'll be sorry when he comes back," he thought, and he giggled, thinking how sorry she would be.

"Why are you laughing, Paul?"

"I'm not laughing."

"Is it funny to be late from school; to wander through vacant lots getting your clothes dirty while I'm waiting here, worrying myself to death?"

"No."

"Well then, what is it?"

"It's . . . it's nothing."

"What?"

"There's a fly in my soup. It's drowning."

Mrs. Pallfeld stood up and looked into his bowl. "There's no fly there! Why do you tell these stories, Paul?"

He hunched over the table, stirring his soup slowly. He did not answer. When his mother sat down, he glanced at the picture and smiled.

Mrs. Pallfeld stacked the dishes carefully on the sink until nothing was left on the table except Paul's bowl. She drummed her fingers on the back of her chair, waiting for him to finish.

Paul heard a faint scratching at the door. "Boots," he smiled. "Let her in, Mother, she's cold out there."

Mrs. Pallfeld snorted. "I'm not going to have that dirty old cat in here. Don't see why you spend all your time playing with it. Won't have you taking any meat from the house to feed it either. Do you hear me!"

Paul snatched his jacket and darted for the door, wrestling into the jacket as he went. His mother's high-pitched voice lashed at him as he eluded her grasp, and he slammed the door behind him, shutting her voice up in the house.

As Paul stepped out, the sun moved from behind thin, scattering clouds, spreading a soft flow of light evenly over the yard. He glanced around anxiously and called for his cat. He peered between the orderly rows of untrimmed rose bushes, but Boots was not in sight. He stood very still, listening to the noises beyond the tall stone wall that shut off the yard from the outside. Branches creaked in the wind and scratched against the wall, crickets chirped in their sheltered crannies, and, further in the distance, he could hear the hysterical yapping of a dog. Boots usually ran to meet him every day as he returned from school, but he could not hear or see her now, and he waited impatiently, listening for her mewing.

Boots was a shabby gray alley-cat with the scars of many battles pock-marking the fur of her flat head, and one of her ears had been

nipped off, giving her head a lop-sided appearance, but Paul loved his cat despite these imperfections. He particularly liked to rub the tender spot behind her ears, and was contented when she quivered in his arms, purring hoarsely.

He began to call her. When she didn't come to him, his voice rose to a shout and he ran frantically through the yard. But his shouting and searching were useless, for Boots did not appear. He leaned against the wall and began to cry, pressing his back against the rough stones. He listened expectantly as his sobbing subsided, then he sniffled, wiped his eyes with grimy hands, and slid down, sitting with his back against the wall. He sat there for a long while, wondering about Boots.

A squeaking sound came from behind the wall . . . a faint animal squeal of pain. Paul shuddered, thinking that Boots might be hurt and crying for him. "I've got to find her," he thought, and he tried to leap up and grab the top of the wall. The wall was too high, and he looked quickly to the side until he saw a large grape-vine draped over the wall. It was black and ugly, seemed to be tearing at the gray stones. His hands tugged feverishly at the rough vine as he struggled to the top of the wall, then he hesitated, trying to see through the thick underbrush on the other side. Broad heart-shaped plantain leaves and scrubby bushes obscured his view, so he jumped from the wall and tumbled into the weeds below.

"Boots!" There was no answer. Paul brushed aside a shrub that blocked his view and called again, but still there was no answer. Then he heard the squeaking sound again and saw a gray form moving in the underbrush by the wall. He stumbled through the weeds and pushed back the yellow-ribboned limbs of a witch hazel. Seeds stung his face as they popped from their pods. Grimacing at the impact of the seeds, he peered into a small clearing between the tree and the wall. Then he saw his cat. She was crouching by the wall, fencing with her paws into the shadow of an overhanging stone.

"Boots," he whispered, but the cat did not turn. Paul walked up behind the cat, his arms outstretched. Suddenly he saw the object of her concentration. A baby mouse was cornered in a crevice between the rough stones of the wall. As he grabbed her from the ground, she plunged her claws into the mouse and snatched it into her mouth. "Let go! Let go!" he pleaded. She clenched the mouse in her jaws, making rumbling noises deep in her throat, and writhed in his arms, trying to escape. A spasm of rage trembled through Paul's body and brilliant spots flashed before his eyes. Inarticulate sounds struggled from his mouth as he began to squeeze the cat, trying to force the mouse from her jaws. His fingers dug into her soft fur, but he was not conscious of their pressure. Suddenly, Boots turned and slashed at him. He felt a stab of pain as her claws raked his hand, and he hurled the cat at the wall. Snatching a branch from the ground, he struck her, but she yowled and ran away. He continued

to lash the ground until the branch splintered in his hand. Then he crumpled to the ground, exhausted.

The sun wavered on the horizon, sending out massive columns of light to gild the clouds. Only the sunset seemed alive, filtering kaleidoscopic hues through the branches of the witch hazel. "God," he thought, and he felt as if he were suddenly being swallowed. Turning cautiously toward the wall, away from the light, he was conscious of a penetrating numbness. He wanted to run, but he couldn't—something seemed to be pressing in on him.

"Paul!" The voice needled his spine. "Paul!" His mother's voice was louder now, re-echoing shrilly, seemingly carried in the air all around him.

He ran to the wall and climbed up the vine. His hands moved surely on the rough bark. When he stood in the yard, he patiently brushed off his clothes. Then, as his mother's worried voice prompted him, he shrugged and walked slowly between the rose-bushes toward the house, kicking the ground absently as he went. The sunset had faded, leaving a quiet charcoal sky spread evenly above him. His hand began to throb where Boots had clawed it, and he clenched his fist, digging his fingernails into the palm until the pressure made him forget the scratches. Then he slumped up the steps and went into the house.

* * * * *

Jonnie and the Old Man

Dorit Paul

THIS Mr. Hicklemeyer, my boss, he was an old man, see. I used to work for him after school and sometimes on Saturdays. He would say on Fridays, "Jonnie, you come in to-morrow," and so I had to come in on Saturday, even if I had tickets for a ball game or something.

He was a jobber, they call it. He was supposed to sell buttons and jewelry and things wholesale. That means at half price. Only he had this sort of store in the front, too, where he'd sell the same stuff at full price to the retail clientele. That's what he called it, only if they bought it by the dozen or so he'd sell it cheaper. That is, if I waited on them he gave me a price for which to sell it, but with him they had to haggle.

He was pretty old and kind of stooped over. He had a funny voice, wheezing sort of like a mosquito in your room at night. He wore these real heavy glasses down his nose, bifocals, and really was a four-eyes if I ever saw one. And did he act as if he had four eyes, too. This store was a real hole in the wall, everything gray and dull and dirty-looking, and you should have seen his desk. I mean the part he kept locked up and where I couldn't clean. But if he saw the littlest speck of dust where I'd swept, would he get mad!